

# Inquiring the promotion of the MDGs in Romania. A discussion with FOND



Since 2007, the Romanian NDGD platform (FOND) is actively involved in increasing the capacity of member civil society organizations in implementing, advocating and monitoring projects and programs in the field of international development and humanitarian aid. As a major actor in the field, a strategic partner of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, FOND has contributed to the promotion of MDGs and enhanced the role of Romania as a new ODA donor country at a local and regional level.

Interviewing **Ms Adela Rusu**, the Coordinator of the [FOND](#) platform, the Romanian NDGO platform which offers support to NGO's working and/or willing to implement projects in the fields of development and cooperation.

**Alexandra:** Adela, what was the role of FOND in promoting the MDGs at national level? Could you summarize the main activities in this regard and sum up their impact?

**Adela:** The Romanian NGDO Platform, which currently has 36 NGOs active in development cooperation, development education and humanitarian aid, has as main role representing its members and very importantly, acts as a support center. It provides the members (for their projects and activities) relevant information and policy briefs on the global agenda, for example on issues such as development effectiveness and the Millennium Development Goals, and more recently on the post-2015 agenda. More specifically, the platform was involved in awareness raising campaign promoting the Global

Call for Action against Poverty' campaign "Stand Up and Take Action" (2008-2009), focused on achieving MDG1 on extreme poverty and supported different campaigns on MDGs implemented by members in recent years. Recently, the platform has taken the role of facilitating national debates on the MDGs agenda by organizing since 2010 an annual event for the national development community – The Romanian Development Camp, with support from the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (as national coordinator of development cooperation) and UNDP – Bratislava Regional Center. The last edition of RDC hosted a debate on the new post-2015 agenda and provided input from the participants for the national position on this important issue.



So, FOND has been mostly involved in raising awareness and facilitating debates on the MDGs and post-2015 agenda, which is very much needed in the Romanian context as development cooperation is not very visible in the public space.

**Alexandra:** One of the main objectives of FOND is the maintenance of an active implication of the Romanian CS organizations in the field of international development and humanitarian aid. How does FOND seek to stimulate the activity of Romanian NGOs in the field, and the coherence and efficiency of their efforts? How does FOND connect its members to European and global debates in this field and support their active engagement in global discussions?

**Adela:** Besides the activities mentioned previously, FOND provides capacity consolidation tailor-made for the needs of the members by organizing trainings and workshops (project proposal writing, advocacy, campaigning, different policy issues: Policy Coherence for Development, the new multiannual EU budget and its effects for the NGO sector, European Year for Development, Sustainable Development Goals ...) and

facilitating the Working Groups of the platform (Policy/Advocacy, Development Education, Humanitarian Aid) by fostering sharing lessons learnt and good practices among the members. For instance, in November we organized a workshop on effective campaigning tools relevant for the Romanian context, as to better prepare the members who will be engaged in promoting the European Year for Development (which will be celebrated in 2015).

FOND connects its members with the regional and international context in two ways: It provides a direct connection with potential partners from Romania's ODA priority countries, by organizing NGO events to support networking, study visits and project writing, such as: The Black Sea NGO Forum (organized since 2008), The Romania-R. Moldova NGO Forum (2010, 2011) which later developed in the Mobility Fund for Experts from Romania and R. Moldova (2013, 2014). This year's edition of the Black Sea NGO Forum will take place in early December (8-10) in Kiev.



In addition, FOND is an active member of The European Confederation of NGOs in Development and Relief (CONCORD) and the International Forum of National NGOs Platform, as well as a partner in two European projects with other similar platforms from the European Union. More recently, FOND has been engaged with the Beyond 2015 campaign by taking part in the European Task Force of this initiative. These connections provide the members with updated and digested information on the development debates at the European and global level and networking opportunities (identifying partners, resource persons, relevant good practices...) and also the opportunity to promote the members' interest and priorities at the European level. It brings visibility to FOND and its members. Since this year, FOND even has a representative elected in CONCORD Board.

**Alexandra: What could be the contribution of the Romanian NGOs in the overall debate that will lead to the new international development agenda?**

*Adela:* The Romanian NGOs provide relevant input on what the priorities should be for the new agenda, based on their experience of promoting the MGDs and on the needs of the beneficiaries of their projects. Their contribution has been emphasized during the last edition of the Romanian Camp VII (which I have already mentioned above) and also is being used as valuable input for the debates at the regional level through our involvement in CONCORD (Beyond 2015 – European Task Force).

**Alexandra: What kind of new synergies, partnerships and policies do you envisage for FOND in the near future in order to address the new SDGs both at national and regional level?**

*Adela:* FOND will continue strengthening its current partnerships at national level (with the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other relevant national stakeholders, such as the Parliament) and at European level (CONCORD and the European institutions, especially the European Parliament). At the international level, we're exploring the opportunity to promote again global campaigns such as Action/2015, initiated by the Global Call to Action against Poverty (GCAP). And of course, we are open to other partnership proposals from other NGOs or different actors interested in this issue.

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# **INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AID**

# AND THE CULTURAL IDENTITY KOBOLD

The starting point of this article is the assertion that development policies aim to modify certain sets of behaviour which ultimately strive at improving human life and potential, primarily developing infrastructures and building the means for that new behaviour to be sustainable and become part of the local mindset.

Some time ago I took part in a heated debate on whether or not culture should play a role in the framework of international aid and more importantly, in the process and management of the aid efforts. Of course, if we were to debate an abstract situation, we would think of culture as a factor which would logically have to be taken in account as long as one functions within a cultural environment which in itself is tributary to its own characteristics. However, as most aid programs do not deal with abstract matters but actual forms of human sufferance, things can get a little uncomfortable to say the least.

Before we charge head-on into sensitive matters though, let us spend a little more time on some abstract yet very tangible aspects of intercultural communication. Thus, there would be two main attitudes with which we could start the abovementioned debate: an ethnocentric one or one of cultural relativism. Both these attitudes towards culture and ultimately people and their mindsets, have traps that one may become a victim of. Nonetheless, behaviour that is practiced over and over again shapes our personalities up to the point that some behaviours are not necessarily logical or beneficial but are regarded as positive because of their wide-spread use and tradition.

If we were to adopt an ethnocentric attitude (from a

Western/European point of view), then we would acknowledge that there are several universal truths to this world and human rights are definitely among them. Thus, the female genitalia mutilation phenomenon that takes place in certain parts of the world is something immoral, unlawful, unjust and illegal and it goes against the very principles that our society is based on. If we were to engage with a community that enforces the aforementioned practices, the way we would implement an aid project would be to confront the phenomenon head-on and as long as we can do something, prevent any and every case that it is in our power to stop. With the adequate political support and funding of the project, we would hope that in time we would reach a goal that a certain percent of the young female population would not have to suffer from genitalia mutilation.

If our choice was a culturally relativist attitude, we would first acknowledge that even if female genitalia mutilation is immoral, unlawful, unjust and illegal in our own culture, it may be an accepted practice in that place where it is practiced. Nevertheless, our purpose in implementing an aid project on the subject within that particular area would be the same, which would still be reducing the percent of young females that are mutilated in this way. However, the approach would have to be a little different, underlining the mindset, not necessarily the practices themselves. Of course, practices are important but the society that practices them is the ultimate arbiter of their use. A certain cultural community, just like markets, has a certain degree of permeability. This means that certain behaviours of the people from that community may permit us to engage with them to a lesser or to a greater degree. The less permeable a cultural community is (of course, also taking in account our instruments of engagement), the harder it is to produce change in people's mindsets. Inescapably, international aid projects have a start date and an end one but the people that live in the targeted communities will continue to exist there long after the

foreign change agent has been long gone. Also, it is important to note that targeted communities are not isolated in most cases, they continually interact with other communities which may or may not retain traditional behaviours related to the targeted phenomenon.

The two attitudes described are ideal types, an optimal attitude most probably benefiting from both the concepts presented. However, the question remains: What happens after the project ends or attention focuses from one region to another? Culture is hard to pinpoint within a statistical report but it exists nonetheless. Practiced behaviour that gives birth to certain mindsets weave people together like an invisible web which can garner an extraordinary counter-force to change, even if the change is, paradoxically, a beneficial one to that society. The web, on the other hand, is as strong as the individual strains that construct it and in this case the people and the families that practice female genitalia mutilation.

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He holds a BA degree in Law and a MA degree in Political Science and International Relations and specialized in informal Islamic justice systems and Intercultural Communication. His studies are backed up by his professional experience; Călin has worked in the legal field for two years, between 2008 and 2010, when he started to work for the Institute of Turkish and Central-Asian Studies. In 2013 he became a licensed trainer and started his Ph.D programme and teaching activities at Babes-Bolyai University (Romania). He coordinates and facilitates Intercultural Communication trainings and seminars, using both formal and non-formal education.

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